

Iowa Department of Public Health Fiscal Year 2010 Annual Report

Iowa Communications Network Videoconferencing Savings Report



This report is prepared pursuant to Iowa Code, Chapter 8D.10

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ICN – A vital link

The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) uses videoconferencing via the Iowa Communications Network (ICN) as a link to public health workers, other government departments, and the general public. It is one of the forms of communication IDPH uses between the department and its partners.

The ICN system is a valuable resource to IDPH as well as the public. Not only does it quickly connect people in a time of need; it is also an effective and cost-saving tool for educating the public health workforce and partnering with our constituents.

IDPH uses the ICN to connect the partners and downlinks broadcasts during the year. Many programs were sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and allowed for the health professionals in Iowa to be connected with public health experts from across the nation.

Accessibility is key

The ICN is an avenue for updating IDPH's constituents on important health issues. Thus, local agency staff, board members, and the public are more likely to participate on task forces or committees if the meetings are held using the ICN.

For many Iowans, a two-hour meeting in a single location such as Des Moines requires almost a full day away from their regular work. Since this is not a feasible option for most people, opportunities to participate and help guide state policies and programs are forfeited.

ICN sessions increase participation

The ICN has proven to be useful in other areas as well. Using the ICN for public hearings on proposed rules or grants has made them more convenient to interested parties throughout Iowa. In many cases, use of the ICN made it possible to hold training sessions that would probably not have occurred without the ICN. Additionally, participation in other training sessions was increased because the sessions were offered locally to the majority of the participants over the ICN rather than only at a single distant site.

The public hearings, meetings of state boards, committees and advisory councils help shape public health's ability to develop policies, and mobilize community partnerships, as well as inform, educate, and empower people about health issues.

To ensure that every possible benefit from the ICN system is utilized, IDPH collects information during the year. This information is gathered via evaluations that are sent to the lead person who initiated the ICN event, as identified on the ICN reservation. Question categories include ICN event usages, alternate delivery options, participation rates, and repeat use of the ICN.

Evaluation comments illustrate benefits of ICN

“More people had the opportunity to attend the public hearing via ICN.”

“Participants like the convenience of viewing the broadcast in or near their city, rather than traveling a long distance.”

“Hosting a meeting or training via ICN when we are experiencing inclement weather is an extra benefit.”

“More people were able to attend this meeting via ICN than if it had been held face to face. It also saves money since attendees don't have to commute to Des Moines.”

“We were able to gather training providers from across the state to train for a new course.”

“Saves travel time and costs.”

Cost savings

The use of ICN videoconferencing is one component of IDPH's operation. In FY 2010, approximately 2,535 people participated in ICN meetings. IDPH's cost savings using the ICN was \$232,564.33. As outlined in this report, the benefits realized by IDPH go beyond financial savings.